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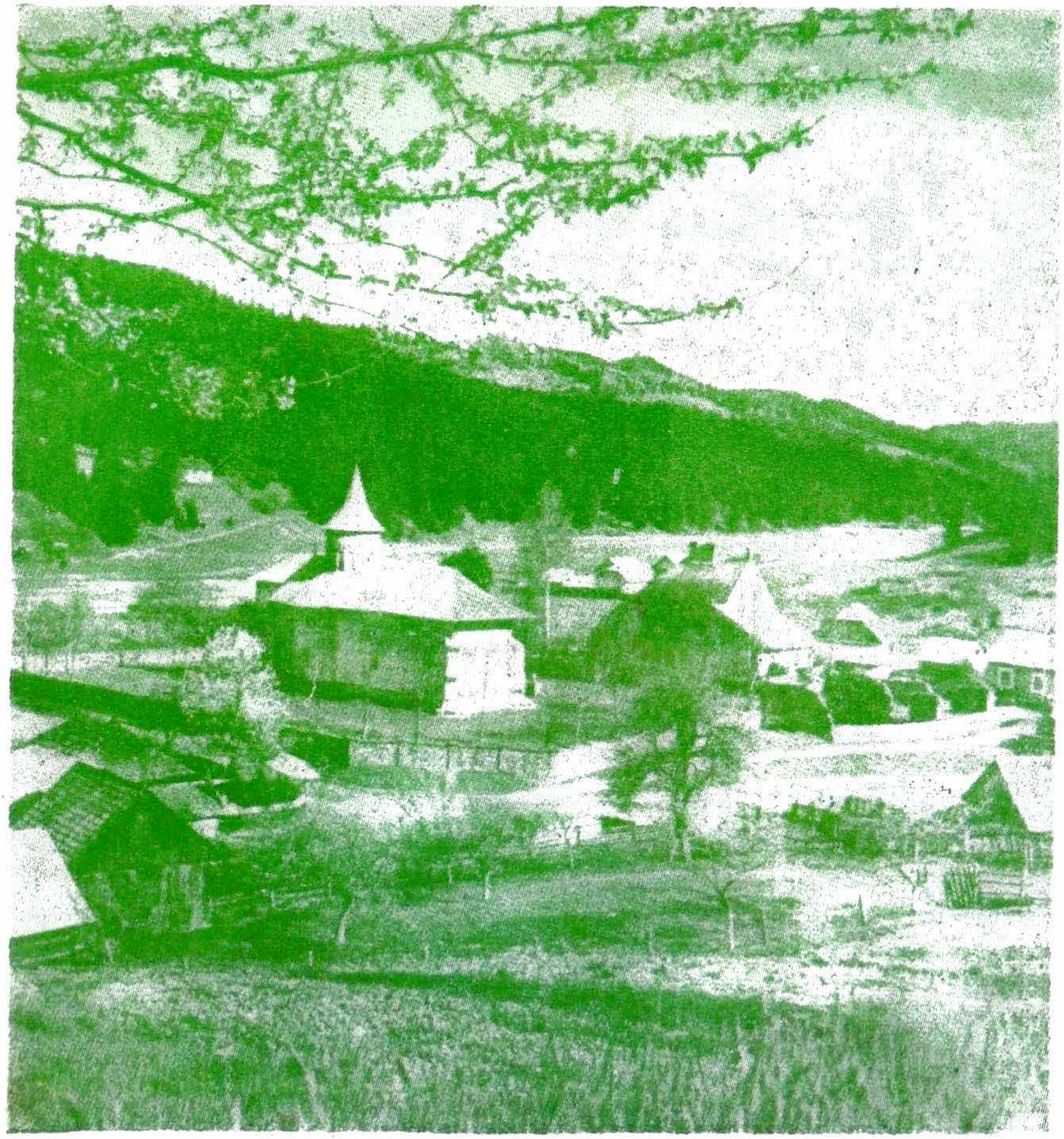

The Legacy of Blessed Paisius

LETTERS

COUNTESS ANNA ORLOVA

I have received the *Orthodox Word* with the article on Countess Orlova. I do not know with what words to express my impression. I am so happy that you have written about her. People have blackened her in the worst way and covered her with dirt. It is a good thing that you have printed this, and the article was very well done, magnificently. What labor must have gone into this spendid issue!

K., California

We have just received your latest *Orthodox Word* (with the Life of Countess Anna), and I am happy that it will carry the light of truth about her through the whole world. Of course, for those who do not know English well, this treasure is unknown. We rejoice and thank God for your holy work.

Rev. V., New York

Ed. comment: The Life of Countess Anna is not available in Russian, being buried in volumes over a hundred years old. In addition, the envy of the devil has raised up many slanders against her, which are often believed by those who do not have access to these rare sources.

I look forward very much to the coming article about Countess Anna Orlova. I would like to tell you an experience I had when visiting Russia on a journey five years ago. We came to Novgorod and great was my joy when it was made possible to go and see the Yuriev Monastery. It proved to be well restored; as for the main buildings, they all looked as if they were new, but everything was apparently quite empty and we were told that it was the idea to use the place as a motel. They were still working on the great church of St. George, but inside there was a tiny exposition showing pictures of Archimandrite Photius and Anna Orlova, explaining the role they had played in the history of the Monastery. Her house outside the walls is also preserved.

When the guide noticed my interest, she came up to me and asked if I knew how Anna Orlova died. I said, "Yes, here," but to my great astonishment and horror the guide began to tell me that during some excavations in 1934, her tomb was opened and her body was found in a completely distorted position, and her hands were lifted as if in a desperate attempt to tear her clothes in order to breathe. This was, of course, interpreted in such a way as to present the Abbot of that time, who had invited her for tea, as having tried to poison her in order to get hold of the money she had bequeathed to the Monastery in her will.

I was deeply shaken, and on returning home I read again the different material I have about her.

E., England

Ed. comment: Such tales are regularly told about relics and other holy objects by Soviet "guides," whose chief purpose, of course, is anti-religious propaganda. Often these tales are invented in order to explain damage done by the Soviet desecrators themseves. Thus do the slanders about Countess Anna continue even long after her death.

Last night I read the life of the Countess Anna/Mother Agnia in *The Orthodox Word*, and recognized in it a challenge for my own life in the world.

(Continued on inside back cover.)

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(chapters 80, 81, 82)

COVER: Voronet Monastery in Rumania, in the vicinity of which many desert dwellers, small sketes and hermitages found their hesychast shelter.

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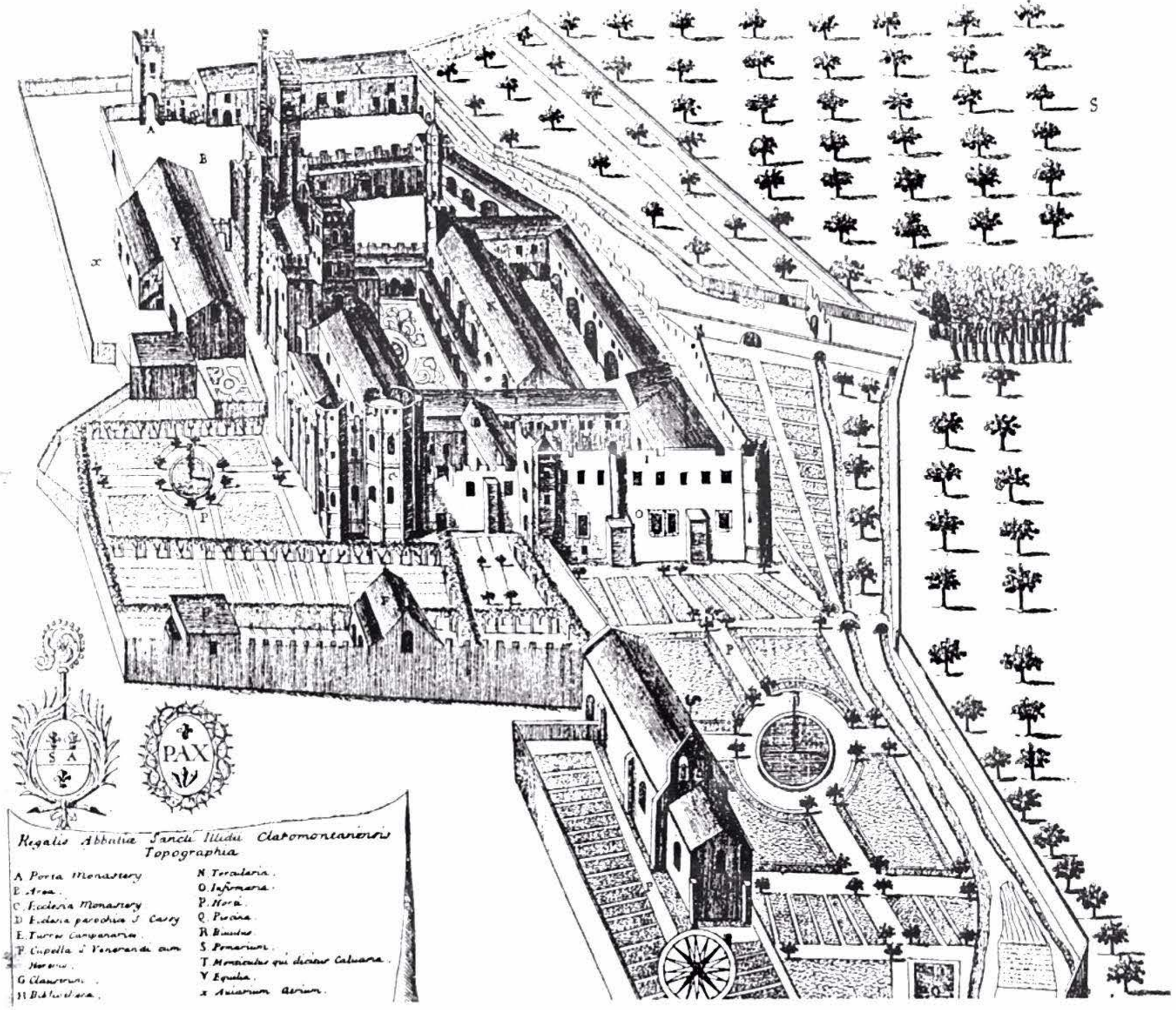

The Monastery of St. Illidius in Clermont
(destroyed in the French Revolution).
16th-century engraving from the *Monasticon Gallicorum*

VITA PATRUM

THE LIFE OF THE FATHERS

By Saint Gregory of Tours

CHAPTER TWO

Saint Illidius the Bishop

WONDERWORKER OF CLERMONT

AMONG THE SEEDS of eternal life which the heavenly sower, in the field of an untilled soul, irrigates with waters flowing from the divine source by His precepts, and which He makes fertile by His doctrine, is the one in which He tells us: *He that doth not take his cross and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me* (Matt. 10:38). And elsewhere He says: *Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal* (John 12:24-25). Moreover, has not the Apostle Saint Paul, that vessel of election, said: *Always bearing about the body the death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body* (II Cor. 4:10)?

Therefore, the confessors of Christ whom the time of persecution had not thrown into martrydom, became their own persecutors in order to become worthy of God, having recourse to various crosses of abstinence; and in order to live with Him alone, they mortified themselves in their members, concerning which the Apostle says: *It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me* (Gal. 2:20). And again, citing this verse of the 43rd Psalm: *For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were counted as sheep for the slaughter* (Rom. 8:36). For they beheld with the eyes of their inward mind the Lord of Heaven descending to earth, not brought low by humility, but humbling himself by His mercy for the redemption of the world; they beheld hanging on a cross, not the glory of the Diety, but the pure victim of the body He had assumed, of which John had foretold a little while before: *Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). They had in themselves the fastening of the nails when, crucified by fear of Him and filled with terror at the Divine judgments,

they bore in the dwelling of their bodies nothing unworthy of His Almightiness, following these words written in Psalm 118: *Nail down my flesh with the fear of Thee, for of Thy judgments am I afraid.*

In them also shone that brilliant light of the Resurrection, with which the angel was resplendent when he removed the stone from the tomb, about which mention is made in the sixteenth chapter of Mark: *And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe; and they were amazed* (Mark 16:5). So Jesus also shone when He entered unexpectedly, the doors being shut, into the midst of the gathering of the Apostles, and when, after filling them with the words of life, He was raised to the heavenly throne.

Among such ones, the blessed confessor Illidius had all things so well placed in the tabernacle of his heart that he also was worthy to become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Being thus about to write something on his life, I ask the indulgence of my readers. Indeed, I have made no study of grammar, and I have not been formed by the learned reading of the authors of the world; but I have obeyed the entreaties of the blessed father Avitus, bishop of Clermont,* who urged me to write works for the Church. Even though the things which I have heard from his preaching or which he obliged me to read have not formed my judgment — since I do not know how to fulfill them — it is he who, after the songs of David, introduced me to the words of the preaching of the Gospel, and then to the histories and epistles which recount the virtue of the Apostles. It is from him that I was able to acquire the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came for the salvation of the world, and to learn to honor with respect worthy of them His friends who took up the cross of an austere way of life and followed the Bridegroom. And so, revealing all the boldness of my ignorance, I am going to recount as well as possible what I have learned concerning the blessed Illidius.

1. Saint Illidius, then, when he had commended himself by the sanctity of his perfect life and united in himself the diverse free gifts which God had bestowed, merited — something which until then had been lacking to his sanctity already so high — to be chosen by the God-inspired people as bishop of the Church of Clermont and shepherd of the Lord's sheep. The renown of his holiness, ascending by various graces, spread not only through all parts of the territory of Auvergne, but it even passed beyond the borders of neighboring cities. And so it happened that the report of his glory came to the ears of the

* The chief of St. Gregory's teachers in his youth; lived 517-594. See the Life of St. Gregory above, ch. 6. (*The Orthodox Word*, 1975, no. 6, pp. 224-5.)

emperor at Trier,** whose daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit and suffered greatly. No one could be found who could deliver her from it, until the public rumor pointed out the blessed Illidius. Immediately the emperor sent messengers, who promptly carried out his orders and brought into the above-mentioned city the saintly old man, who was received with much respect by the prince, who was greatly grieved by the unfortunate state of his daughter. With true faith in the Lord, the bishop prostrated himself in prayer, and when he had passed an entire night in sacred hymns and spiritual songs, he placed his fingers in the young girl's mouth and expelled the evil spirit from her tormented body. The emperor, seeing this miracle, offered the holy bishop immense sums of gold and silver. The latter refused them but obtained that the city of Clermont, which was paying tribute in wheat and wine, might pay it in gold, because it was with great labor that duties in kind were transported to the public treasury. The saint, having fulfilled the time of this present life, died, as it is said, on this same journey in order to go to Christ. Borne up by his own people, he was buried in his city.

2. And perhaps — as men are very often wont to murmur — someone will babble, saying, "It is impossible that for the working of a single miracle this man should be numbered among the saints." Yet if one weighs well what the Lord has said in the Gospel — *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out demons by Thy name, and do many miracles? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you* (Matt. 7:22-23) — then surely one will say that the virtue that comes forth from the tomb is more praiseworthy than that which one has brought forth while alive in the world; for the latter may have some blemish by the continual hindrances of worldly occupations, whereas the former is free from all stain.

Since, then, as we believe, the things done by Saint Illidius before that time have been given up to oblivion and have not come to our notice, we shall recount what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have put to the test, or what we have learned from persons worthy of credence.

At the time when Bishop Gallus* governed the Church of Clermont, he who writes these things was still young and fell gravely ill; he was often visited by the bishop, who loved him dearly, being his uncle. His stomach was filled with a great quantity of liquid, and he was seized with a high fever. Then there came to the child a desire, which I believe came from God, to have

** Trier (or Treves) in the north of Gaul, was known as the "Rome beyond the Alps," the second city of the Empire in the West and the frequent residence of the Roman emperors in the 4th century. The emperor in question here was Maximus, who ruled in the West from 384.

* His life is chapter six of *Vita Patrum*.

himself carried to the basilica of blessed Illidius. And when he had been carried on the arms of servants to the saint's tomb and had prayed with tears, he felt himself better than when he had come; but upon returning to his house, he was seized anew by the fever.

Now one day, when he began to be worse and the fever was afflicting him more than usual, to the point where it was doubted that he would recover from it, his mother came to him and said, "Today, my sweet son, I shall have a sad day, since you have such a high fever." And he answered, "Do not think, I beg you, of any sadness, but send me back to the tomb of the blessed bishop Illidius; for I believe, and it is my faith, that his virtue will gain for you joy, and for me health." Then, having been carried to the saint's tomb, he made a prayer prostrate to the Lord that if he were delivered from his illness by the intercession of His bishop, he would become a cleric, and that he would leave there only if his prayer obtained its object. No sooner had he spoken thus than he felt the fever leave him immediately, and calling the servants, he asked to be taken back home. There he was placed on a bed, and while they were at table, he had a great nosebleed, and the fever came to an end with the flow of blood: which certainly happened by the merits of the blessed confessor. Recently, also, a servant of Count Venerandus, after having been blind a long time, kept vigil near the saint's tomb and returned from it healed.

3. As for what took place on the subject of his relics, here is what the above-mentioned writer** saw with his own eyes. In the first year of his episcopate (573 A.D.), he had dedicated, below the episcopal residence in Tours, an oratory in which he placed some relics of this holy bishop together with those of other saints.* Many days after the dedication, he was advised by the abbot to visit the relics which he had placed in the altar-table, lest by the dampness of the new building they be given over to corruption. Having found them damp, he took them up from the altar-table and began to dry them by the fire. Then he put them back in their own containers and came to the relics of the blessed bishop Illidius. As he held them before the fire, the thread by which they were held, because it was too long, fell on the glowing coals, and like copper or iron began to glow from the fire's heat. And although he took little notice what became of the thread by which the holy relics had been held, thinking it already to have been reduced to ashes, he discovered it whole and unharmed, because it had served a little while before as a bond for the glorious hierarch.

** That is St. Gregory himself.

* For a description of this event, see the Life of St. Gregory, ch. 25. (*The Orthodox Word*, 1976, no. 4, p. 120)

4. There was an infant about ten months old who was accepted as being — and it was recognized as true — a great-grandnephew of the blessed one himself; this infant was afflicted with the approach of a grievous sickness. His mother was weeping, not as much over the death of her child, as that he had not yet received the Divine sacrament of Baptism. Finally, having taken counsel, she betook herself to the tomb of the blessed confessor, placed on the stone the sick child who had scarcely a breath left in him, and did not cease to keep vigil and pray over the tomb.

Now when the bird that announces the light had chanted more loudly than usual, flapping his wings, the infant who had remained stretched out and nearly dead regained his strength. Showing by a smile the joy of his heart, he opened his mouth by means of the Divine assistance and calling his mother said, "Come here." But she, filled with fear and joy — for she had never before heard her son's voice — stood dumbfounded. "What do you want, my sweetest child?" He answered, "Run as fast as you can and bring me a cup of water." But she remained unmoving in prayer until the coming of day, giving thanks to the holy bishop and consecrating her son to him; then she returned home. The infant drank the water offered to him, and delivered from all infirmity, fully recovered his health. Then, returning to the first cries of infancy, he could no longer speak until he had attained the age at which infants' tongues are usually loosened for speech.

I do not think I ought any longer to pass over in silence what happened at the time when an oven was lit to bake the lime for the basilica. The lintel, which held solidly in place the entrance of the oven, broke while those who were there together with the abbot of the place were sleeping. Immediately there appeared to the abbot a bishop who said to him, "Hasten to wake up those who are sleeping, lest the ruin of the house which is threatening overtake them. The lintel which holds the mass of the stones is on the point of falling with the fire." The abbot awoke, made everyone run from the entrance of the oven, and the mass of stones fell on both sides without injuring any of those present — which would not have occurred, I think, wihout the bishop's intervention. Then the abbot, after making prayer over the saint's tomb, had the lintel repaired and the stones replaced, and they could finish, thanks to the bishop's help, the work which had been begun.

The blessed body of the confessor was of old buried in a vault, but since the building was narrow and difficult of entry, Saint Avitus, bishop of the city, had an apse made in circular form and of admirable workmanship, and having gathered the blessed limbs which he found in a coffin made of wood, he enclosed them according to custom in a sarcophagus. In that place reposes

one who was Justus (just) both by merits and name, who is said to have been the glorious hierarch's archdeacon.

5. There are reported of the same saint many other miracles which I have judged too long to recount, thinking what I have said to suffice for a perfect faith; for many things will not be of use to him for whom this little does not suffice. Indeed, at his tomb the blind see, demons are cast out, the deaf recover their hearing, and the lame the use of their limbs, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who promises to those who have faith that He will grant them all that they ask for without doubt in the success of their prayers.

NOTES

St. Illidius (*Allyre* in French) was the fourth bishop of Clermont. He died probably in 385, on June 5, on which day his feast is celebrated.

The tomb of the daughter of Emperor Maximus was preserved in the Abbey of St. Illidius at least until 1311, in which year it was uncovered by the (Roman Catholic) bishop of the city together with an inscription which testified to her healing by St. Illidius.

The Abbey of St. Illidius in the city of Clermont-Ferrand, where the saint's relics were kept, was destroyed in the French Revolution.

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

CONTEMPORARY "AFTER-DEATH" EXPERIENCES IN THE LIGHT OF ORTHODOX TEACHING ON THE AFTERLIFE

THE AERIAL REALM OF SPIRITS

In order to understand what is the realm into which the soul enters at death, we must look at it in the whole context of man's nature. We shall have to know of man's nature before his fall, the changes it underwent after the fall, and the capabilities man has for entering into contact with spiritual beings.

Perhaps the most concise Orthodox discussion of these subjects is to be found in the same book of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov which we have already quoted concerning the Orthodox doctrine of angels (vol. III of his collected works). Bishop Ignatius devoted one chapter of this book to a discussion of "the sensuous perception of spirits" — that is, angelic and demonic apparitions to men. In what follows we shall quote this chapter, which gives the Orthodox Patristic teaching, soberly and precisely handed down by one of the great Orthodox Fathers of modern times. (Titles added by translator.)

Man's Original Nature

"Before the fall of man, his body was immortal, a stranger to infirmities, a stranger to its present crudeness and heaviness, a stranger to the sinful and fleshly feelings that are now naural to it. (St. Macarius the Great, Homily 4.) His senses were incomparably more subtle, their activity was incomparably broader and totally free. Being clothed with such a body, with such organs of sense, man was capable of the sensuous perception of spirits, to which rank he himself be-

longed in soul; he was capable of communion with them, of that Divine vision and communion with God which is natural to holy spirits. The holy body of man did not serve as a hindrance to this, did not separate man from the world of spirits. Man, clothed in a body, was capable of dwelling in paradise, in which now only saints, and only in their souls, are capable of remaining, into which the bodies of the saints also will ascend after the resurrection. Then these bodies will leave in the grave the crudeness which they assumed after the fall; then they will become spiritual, even spirits, in the expression of St. Macarius the Great (Homily 6, ch. 13), and will manifest in themselves those qualities which were given them at their creation.* Then men will again enter the rank of the holy spirits and will be in open communion with them. We may see an example of the body that will be at the same time both body and spirit in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection.

The Fall of Man

"By the fall both the soul and body of man were changed. In the strict sense the fall was for them also a death. That which we see and call death is in essence only the separation of the soul from the body, both of which had already before this been put to death by an eternal death! The infirmities of our body, its subjection to the hostile influence of various substances from the material world, its crudeness — these are a consequence of the fall. By reason of the fall our body entered into the same rank as the bodies of animals; it exists with an animal life, the life of its fallen nature. It serves for the soul as a prison and tomb.

"These expressions we have used are strong. But even so they do not adequately express the descent of our body from the height of the spiritual condition to the fleshly condition. One must cleanse oneself by careful repentance, one must feel at least to some degree the freedom and height of

(Continued on page 230.)

* There is, however, a distinction in subtlety between the body of man in paradise before his fall, and his body in heaven after the resurrection. See Homily 45, ch. 5, of St. Symeon the New Theologian, in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 76. (*Ed note.*)

The Life and Ascetic Labors of Our Father, Elder Paisius, Archimandrite of the Holy Moldavian Monasteries of Niamets and Sekoul. Part Twenty.

80. THE DAILY LIFE OF PAISIAN MONKS*

THE TYPICON or monastic rule, both for church services and the general daily life of the monks, which was instituted by Blessed Paisius in the Niamets coenobitic monastery in many respects was similar to the monastic order and rule of the Holy Mountain of Athos.

The most remarkable aspect of monastic life in the spirit of this typicon is the especially prolonged church services. The daily cycle of services begins in this way: Not long before midnight, one of the monks comes out in his monastic mantle with a long board on his shoulder which he hits with a wooden hammer, walking around the church several times. After this is heard the striking of the *bilo,* a metallic plank attached to a pole, and then begins the pealing of the bells for the service. At this time in church the candles and icon-lamps are being lit; all the monks take their assigned places and each one of them can unhypocritically exclaim with the Psalmist, "At midnight I arose to give thanks unto Thee" (Ps. 118:62). Nocturns is followed by Matins, which continues for four hours; then there is the reading of the Akathist before the Niamets icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, which lasts an hour and a half; and finally the Liturgy.

At five in the afternoon begins the Vespers, and after the evening meal all the monks gather to hear the evening prayers. In his way the daily simple church services in the Niamets Monastery last about 14 hours; on feast days they are even longer, since the All-night Vigil begins at 8 in the evening and continues all through the night, ending with the early Divine Liturgy, after which there follows the late Liturgy.

After every service the monks, having received the dismissal blessing, come together in the middle of the church, in front of the royal doors, and they

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* This chapter is from Bishop Nikodim's *Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th centuries,* October volume, pp. 541 ff.

sing a canon to the Most Holy Mother of God. After leaving the church, they form a half circle in front of the main western kliros and, raising their eyes to an icon which crowns the doors, they perform a silent prayer in their hearts. And only then do all disperse in silence. Such performance of the church services in their entirety naturally transforms one to thoughts and awareness of God's presence. It absorbs the whole being of the man who prays to such a degree; it so fills his soul with thoughts of what is eternal, elevated, and Divine, that everything falls away from him by itself, the voice of the passions is silenced, and even exhaustion itself becomes unburdensome and unfelt.

According to a tradition established by Blessed Paisius, the reading and singing is performed in two languages: on the right side *(kliros)* in Church Slavonic, and on the left in Moldavian.

But there is even more to the inner order of Niamets Monastery than this. According to the Instructions written by Elder Paisius himself, "The Superior ought to pay heed that various arts and handicrafts be practiced in the monastery, without which no human life can be kept up. Thus there have been instituted various handicrafts for the brethren in their cells." Many monks occupied themselves with carpentry and woodcarving, making prayer-ropes, or wooden spoons with intricate carving; others would prepare monastic garb, mantles, and klobuks. Knowing that idleness is the mother of all evil, Paisius in his Instructions obliged the Abbot to see that "no one sits idly in his cell, but for the sake of acquiring the wisdom of humility, true obedience and the cutting off of all of one's self-will and opinion, the Abbot is to appoint his monks to various obediences for the upkeep of the monastic household: in the kitchen, the bread-bakery, the storehouses, the trapeza, the beehives, and at literary work," which consisted in copying and re-copying patristic manuscripts and preserving them in the monastery scriptorium and the library, the translating and editing of these books, etc.

81. THE SPIRIT OF THE PAISIAN TYPICON*

From the following excerpts from the lives of the Paisian monks Theophanes (later of Solovki) and Theodore (later of Svir) we can see a glimpse

* The following two excerpts are from: *Solovki Patericon,* Petersburg, 1873, pp. 138-9; and *Optina Elder Leonid, in Schema Leo* by Clement Sederholm, St. Herman Brotherhood, Platina, Ca., 1976, pp. 239ff and 268ff.

of the spiritual wisdom of Blessed Paisius in his harmonious and properly balanced measuring-out of his limitless fatherly love and disciplinary strictness. *Elder Theophanes (+1819)* in his youth was kind of cell-attendant to the famous holy Kiev Caves recluse, the cave-dweller *Dositheus* (+*1776,* actually a woman, as was discovered after her death) who was not only in spiritual contact with Elder Paisius, but even acted as a disseminator of Paisian influence in the southern part of Russia by directing suitable people to Paisian spiritual centers — to monasteries, sketes, recluses, or bishops of spiritual insight.

"The young Theophanes studied true monastic life from this holy ascetic, *Dositheus*. But soon a desire began to burn in him to visit the holy places sanctified by the events of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Theophanes asked his elder to give him his blessing for this long voyage, he received the answer: "No, your path is not to Jerusalem, nor to the Holy Mountain of Athos; a different path awaits you in due time, but for now, if you wish, go to Moldavia, this will be of benefit to you." And he told Theophanes to go to Podol (the lower part of the city of Kiev), and to find there two Moldavian monks and to bring them to him. One of these monks was Sophronius, a friend and fellow-faster of the great Paisius, who became the Archimandrite of Niamets after Paisius. Having accomplished all the assignments entrusted to him by Paisius, Sophronous was about to set out on his way back, when Dositheus called him and asked that he take with him his disciple Theophanes. The Moldavian monks gladly took Theophanes with them and made use of his services on the way which somewhat helped on their traveling. As for Theophanes, the journey seemed to him far from easy due to the harassments of the Turks and other deprivations, so much so that he even regretted having left Kiev. As they were approaching Niamets, the travellers were met by Paisius, who greeted Theophanes with the following words: "Child Theophanes, not in vain was your journey, it will prepare for you your reward." Thus having been lovingly received, Theophanes at first settled in Niamets Monastery, then walking he visited other neighboring monasteries, admiring their locations, learning about their rule of church services and monastic typicon, the habits and customs of the monks' daily life. The example of the life of these monks seemed to him to be very profitable. Their non-acquisitiveness was complete: in their cells, except for an icon, a book and a few tools for handicrafts, there was nothing else. These monks were especially noteworthy for their humbleness,

estranging themselves from pride and haughtiness. They did not know hatred or quarrels among themselves. If it would happen that someone, due to carelessness or agitation, would hurt another, such a one would hasten to make peace with him whom he had hurt. And he who would not want to forgive the brother who had thus sinned, was chased out of the Monastery. The very walk of the monks was modest and reverent. Their eyes were lowered to the ground. Upon meeting they would respectfully bow to each other. In church they stood in their assigned places. Idle talk was not permitted, not only in church, but also in the whole monastery and even outside of it. There were about 700 brethren living then with Abba Paisius. They were from various countries — there were Moldavians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Turks, Great Russians and Little Russians; they all crossed themselves with three fingers. When they would gather for a common obedience a hundred or a hundred-fifty men together, then one brother would read a book aloud, or would relate some soul-profiting account. If someone would start talking idly, he would immediately be stopped. In their cells some would copy books, others spin flax, or sew monastic cowls, klobuks or kamilavkas, others again would carve out wooden spoons, crosses, or would occupy themselves with other handicrafts. No one would dare on his own will to eat even a piece of fruit, which abounded in that country; only with a blessing and all together they would partake of the fruits of the earth for the glory of God. This life appealed to his heart, and Theophanes asked Paisius to allow him to stay in Moldavia."

The other Paisian monk, *Elder Theodore (+1822)* had a different monastic beginning before he came to the great Elder Paisius, although he also strove for a monastic life with all his soul. He had great difficulty in breaking ties with the world, being involved even in an illicit relationship with a woman. Finally, having torn asunder the last link with the world, he fled to Moldavia straight to Paisius, walking in shabby clohes and pennyless for hundreds of miles, and he arrived in Jassy:

"About a hundred miles from Jassy, at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, is located Niamets Monastery in a rather picturesque isolation, where seven hundred meek and humble brethren spend their life in fasting and mortifying their flesh. Theodore also wanted to join his life to this army of God's slaves who war under the banner of the Cross of Christ. Their wise leader was the great Elder Paisius, who at this time was already sickly and

would almost never leave his cell. Theodore implored the fathers at the gate to accept him, but they refused him. Being in a desperate state, with winter approaching, he implored them to at least allow him the consolation of receiving the blessing of Elder Paisius. This they did. In embarassment and trepidation, Theodore presented himself before the earthly angel, Blessed Paisius, who received the poor wanderer with his usual humility and joy, and looking at his clothing, and especially after learning of his pitiable situation, he burst into tears of compassion. With words of love and fatherly care he consoled the pilgrim and immediately ordered that he be numbered among his God-preserved flock. From that time Paisius strictly forbade the monks to refuse acceptance to anyone without his knowledge. (This rule remained in the Paisian Typicon). The happy Theodore was accepted and given an obedience in the bread bakery, where he also stayed, since there was no vacant cell. According to the monastic custom, he was entrusted to his spiritual father, Elder Sophronius. With heartfelt contrition he confessed all his sins, and for better purification and repentance was deprived of receiving holy communion for five years. In accordance with the monastic typicon, Theodore went through all the stages of obedience: he cut and carried firewood, cooked food, heated the stoves, swept floors, took care of beehives — in a word, did all the hard work to which he had not previously been accustomed. In two years, because of his exemplary life and strict fulfillment of all his obediences, he was sent as a prosphora-baker's assistant to the neighboring Sekoul Monastery, a dependency of Niamets, which was some ten miles away. There he heard about the desert dwellers in the Voronet wilderness and asked at first Elder Sophronius, and then Paisius himself, for permission to join the desert dwellers in order to help them in their old age. The wise elders with joy blessed his intention, and Paisius immediately sent him on his way. Thus he entered on the difficult labor of a complete desert life."

82. THE LOVE FOR THE DESERT*

IN THE MIDST of all their activities, where precisely was the *heart* of Paisius' monks? It was in the desert, in the love for the silent inward activ-

* For the sources of this chapter see the Notes in the end of this book.

ity in secluded forested mountains. And Blessed Paisius' knowledge of the monastic pitfalls protected them, keeping them on the path of sobriety and inspiring whole generations of true Orthodox hesychasts.

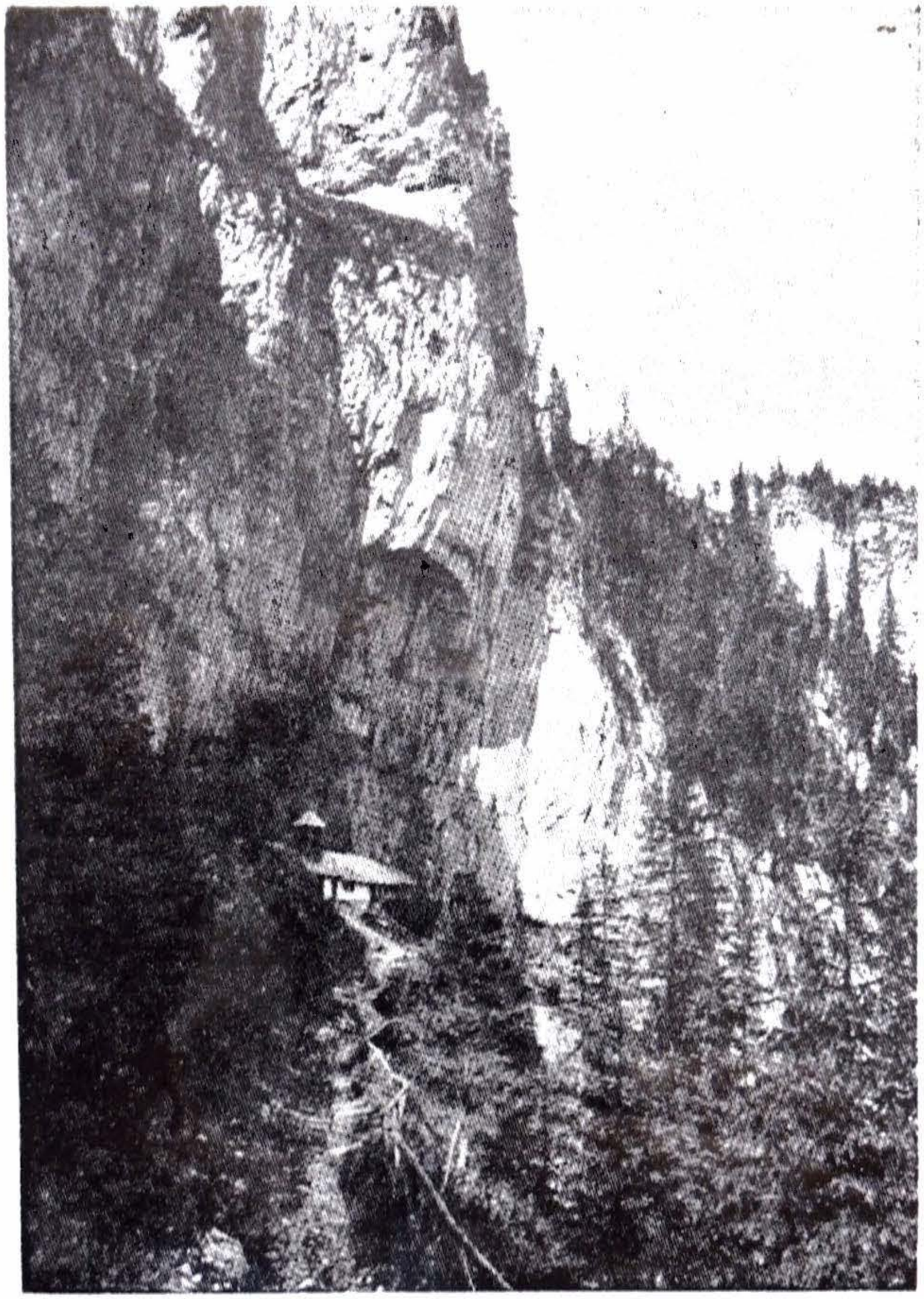
It is known that during the whole of Paisius' life he was in contact with many contemporary desert-dwellers, and that he blessed his trustworthy disciples on this path, himself having undergone it in his formative monastic years. Among his immediate disciples who were desert-dwellers were: *Blessed John the Fingerless,* who lived alone in the forest in the region of Voronet Monastery; *Blessed Onuphrius* and *Nicholas* who came from Russia to live deep in the desert under Paisius' guidance; and his young compatriot *Theodore,* (the future elder of Leo of Optina) whom he blessed to be a desert-dweller at a rather young age. There were many others.

After Paisius' repose, many of his Russian disciples went back to Russia, bringing with them and disseminating very vigorously precisely this desert ideal. These were holy men, strikingly reminiscent of the ancient desert ascetics, and they were a chief cause of the 19th-century flowering of sanctity in Russia.

Here we will mention a few of them: *Theophanes* went as far north as the arctic wilderness of Solovki; *Theodore,* having buried his desert companions Onuphrius and Nicholas, went to live in a cave, then was joined by *Cleopas* (whose relics a century later were found incorrupt at Valaam) and labored together with Leo of Optina in the great northern monastic desert regions of Valaam, leaving his line of disciples in the region of the St. Alexander of Svir monastery; another *Cleopas,* being persecuted and in constant wandering, inspired the fatherless disciples of Elder Theodore of Sanaxar, Macarius, Hilarion, Theophanes (the future cell-attendent of Metropolitan Gabriel) and later such renowned desert lovers as Basilisk and Zosimas of Siberia; another *Theophanes* sought refuge in the famous dense forests of Roslavl, with the future founders of that Paisian citadel, Optina Monastery, the brothers *Moses* and *Anthony,* and also Dorotheus. These brothers inherited from their Elder Athanasius a large collection of Paisius' patristic manuscripts, which they scrupulously copied and recopied in their almost inaccessible forest huts day and night, using splinters of wood for light at night, since they were very poor. Incidentally, they performed this labor of copying patristic books with the utmost fear of God, and unfailingly in a standing position out of their deep respect for the

Voronet Monastery Valley at the foot of the forested mountains which gave shelter to hermits John the Fingerless, Onuphrius, Nicholas, Theodore and other disciples of Blessed Paisius.

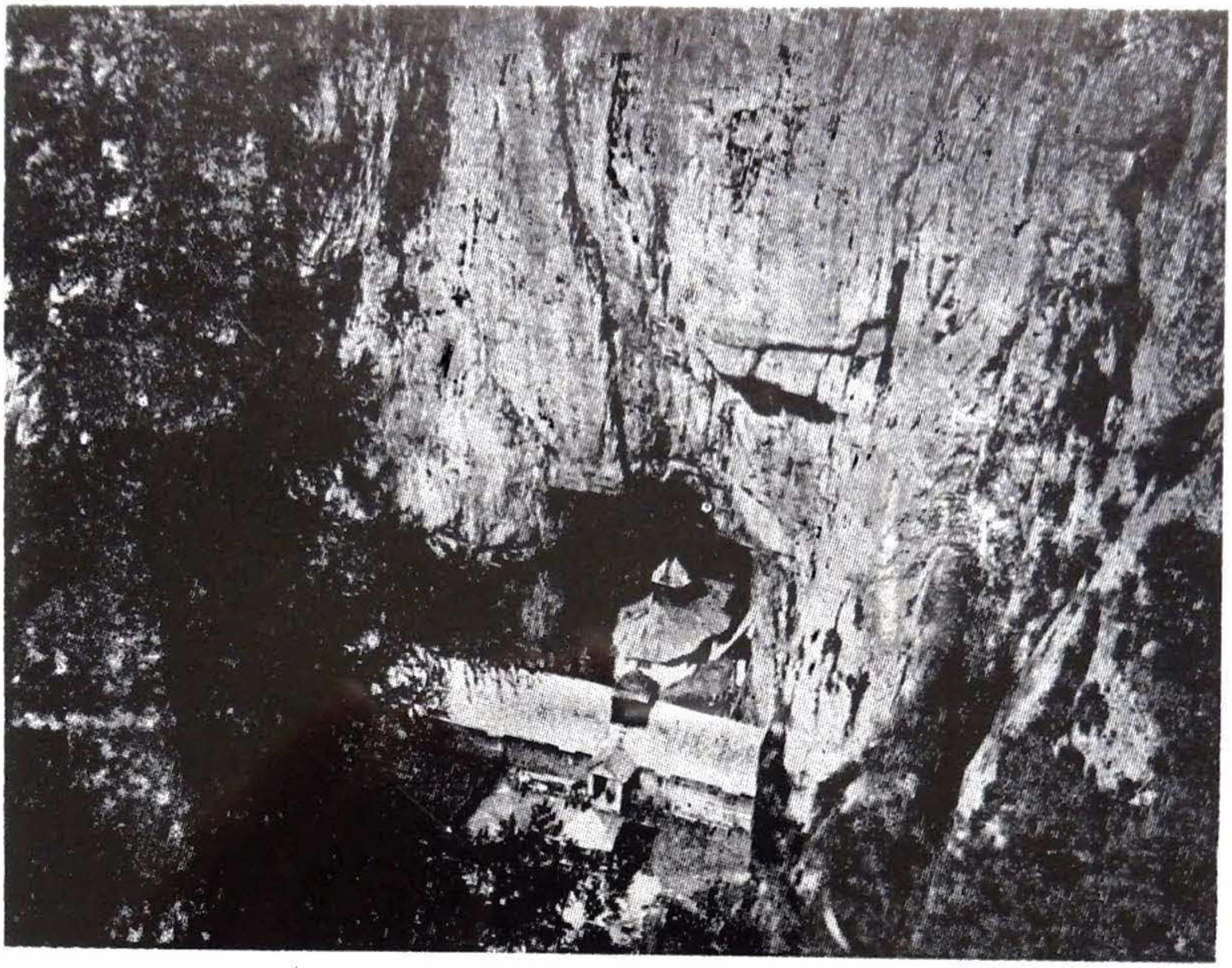
The neighboring Agape Convent which housed Paisian spiritual daughters



A narrow walk leads to the church perched halfway inside the cave

CAVE-DWELLING IN ROUMANIA

In secluded, thickly forested mountains the Moldavian desert-lovers settled literally in the clefts and caves of the earth, true examples, as St. Paul wrote, of whom the world is not worthy. The photographs on these pages show such a hermitage of Jalomita-Hollow where the monks built their church at the entrance of the cave.



View from above of the cave-dwellers' monastery church

Monastery court as seen from inside the cave

IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAIN GORGES,
A SKETE-DWELLER GOES FOR WATER

The atmosphere of a typical Vlachian Skete as it presented itself before the young Paisius, introducing him to the new world of the hesychast lovers of the humilit, of wisdom.

A PAINTING BY VOLKOV

holy texts. This priceless collection was the basis which served for the future publication of patristic books by Optina Monastery under the supervision of another Paisian disciple, *Macarius,* the promptings of the philosopher Ivan M. Kireyevsky, and the patronage of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow. These books were widely distributed and were instrumental in the spread of the Paisian ideal and the monastic flowering in Russia, Mt. Athos, and the Holy Land right up to the Revolution of 1917.

There were many other disciples of Blessed Paisius, such as *Arsenius* of White Banks, *Athanasius,* and *Ambrose* of the Gorokhov Hermitage who was seen all shining with uncreated light. These and other disciples of Paisius will be covered at some length in the next Volume of this biography.

In Rumania, on the other hand, where Paisius' relics worked miracles, the desert ideal remained longest not in his monastic establishments (Niamets Monastery and others), but in the forests and mountains of Moldavia. These were filled with anchorites of Paisian inspiration, due largely to an actual persecution of the established monasteries by the new government. It was the desert sketes and solitary hermitages that gave refuge to this spirit, where it was kept alive for over a hundred years until our time, when after World War II the Communist regime began to uproot Christianity altogether.

As an illustration of how Paisian monasticism has lingered on into our century and our antitheistic time, let us quote at some length from an article based on witnesses who have lived under the Rumanian Communist Yoke:*

"Hundreds and hundreds of ascetics, sometimes attaining the sanctity of the great desert saints of ancient times, were nurtured under the grace-filled influence of Paisius Velichkovsky. The Rumanian land, Moldavia, was vouchsafed to preserve the remains of this great Elder who never returned to Russia. This territory from of old was a crossroads for various monks travelling from the East, and from Russia, thus being a source of spiritual enlightenment for the local people. Here many large foreign monasteries had their holdings, or *metochia;* for example, the Sinai Monastery had the 'Sinaia' next to the King's residence. There were many hesychasts. Hesychasm came from Mount Athos, Blessed Paisius being a leading disseminator of it, and it survived until our times, when, being tested by martyrdom it gave a magnificent harvest, so blind-

* "Pravoslavny Blagovestnik," monthly periodical, San Francisco, No. 3, March, 1967, pp. 43-45.

ing in its spiritual beauty that the contemporary world, deep in the pollution of sin, is not only powerless to see and sense this unearthly beauty, but is already almost a participant in the rapid liquidation of this reflection of Christ. Here is what we have learned, almost as a secret.

"In Rumania just before our time, there were some 200 desert recluses in the mountains. They lived in caves and would die there in seclusion; only their bones would remain in the caves with signs: 'Here lived the sinful monk so and so,' and the like. To some of these monks people would bring food from monasteries and would leave it somewhere nearby for them to take. But there were some anchorites whom it was impossible to reach, and they existed by themselves without help from outside."

"A certain monk, a friend of O.A., was walking with a guide in these mountains. It was a fiercely cold winter. Suddenly this monk sensed an unusual fragrance, as if from flowers blooming. He asked: 'What kind of smell can this be in such frost?" And the guide answered as if it were something quite ordinary: 'This is from some relics. Anchorites used to live in the caves all around here.'

"When the persecution of the Church began, many young people came to faith, mostly students, and especially many simple workers. Fr. N., who supplied us with this information, was then a student and he himself came to the Church and to monasticism at that time. All the prisons were filled with monks and nuns. Out of six or seven thousand prisoners there were 2500 monastics. Of these some 500 survived — they dressed in lay clothing and hid themselves among the people. Unfortunately the famous Niamets Monastery, where the great Paisius Velichkovsky had his spiritual seedbed, now is only a show monastery.

"One Catholic priest, who was imprisoned together with Orthodox monks, related that he can testify of how in his presence a certain Father Gerasim was dying in this prison, and how before his death his face shone with the light of Mt. Tabor.

"Pastor Wurmbrand, who suffered in Communist prisons, told the following to some Orthodox listeners: Once they brought into the prison cell an Orthodox Elder-hieromonk, so holy and pure in heart that he was like a child; even the Communists could not understand why he had been arrested. everybody rushed to him for confession, not only Orthodox, but also heterodox

They shoved him in, saying as a sarcastic joke, 'He will confess you!' And everybody rushed to him for confession, not only Orthodox, but also heterodox and Jews, and even the Communists themselves. Pastor Wurmbrand said that he, moved by some unknown power, confessed to him everything, including shameful things which never in his whole life would he admit. But here everything by itself just poured out of him. And the worse were the things he said, the more did the face of the Elder shine with joy, because the soul of the sinner was being cleansed. He was released, and the whole day everybody, even the guards, were as if holy; but this was not for long. The next day everything became worse. The prisoners made a tacit agreement with the guards: the guards would beat them as they pleased, both with knives and bayonets, and they would not protest; but in exchange the guards would allow them to pray as much as they wanted to. Priests would serve the Divine Liturgy on the chests of the dying in place of an antimension. Somehow they managed to obtain wine.

"Once into the cell where an Archimandrite of the Tisman Monastery was incarcerated, they placed a hardened criminal, who was to torture the monk every day ni order to get some information from him — such was their system. But when it became apparent that from the Archimandrite it was impossible to get information under any condition, then the order came to torture the criminal to death . . . In the end both were dying, lying together. The torturer bitterly wept and repented. The Archimandrite was consoling and comforting him, saying: 'If I feel so sorry for you, then how much more should Christ have pity on you.' The monk-martyr Archimandrite confessed him and read the prayer of absolution over him. They both received holy communion and both died together.

"Holy monk-martyrs of Rumania, pray to God for us!"

83. THE NIAMETS PRINTSHOP*

Under Paisius' guidance, besides the Slavonic library there was an equally rich Rumanian library in Niamets, since nearly all the works translated into Slavonic were simultaneously translated into Rumanian. Of the Slavonic texts, one was published during Paisius' lifetime, while several Rumanian manuscripts began to be published after his death.

* "Paisius Velichkovsky" by Antonios Emilianou Tachiaos (in Greek), Thessaloniki, 1964, pp. 119 ff.

The group of translators under the supervision of the Rumanian Hieromonk Macarius soon began to offer the fruits of its labors. Already in 1775 *The Homilies of Macarius the Great* were published in Bucharest. This attracted the attention of many people and inspired the hierarchs who took part in the publishing activity of the Monastery, especially Metropolitan Benjamin Costachi, himself a disciple of Paisius. The Monastery acquired its own printshop and now, without hindrance and much expense, could begin printing the manuscripts acquired in such abundance. The first book to be printed was the *Menaion* for September, which was published in 1807 with two introductions written by Hieromonk Dorotheus and Metropolitan Benjamin; both mentioned Paisius and his significance. This publication marked the beginning of an unusually abundant printing and publishing activity of ecclesiastical and church service books, as well as theological and instructive books, which were indispensable for the Rumanian Church.

The first ascetical book, published in 1812, was the Paisian Slavonic translation of St. Isaac the Syrian, the only one in the Slavonic language, all the others being in Moldavian. Then, in 1814, followed *The Ladder* of St. John Climacus, which remained the favorite spiritual reading of the Rumanians. In 1817 came out the *Life* of Elder Paisius himself; the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian, in three volumes, came out in 1818, 1819 and 1823.

St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain was in close contact with Metropolitan Benjamin and also collaborated with him in the Niamets publishing activity. He was an ardent admirer of Paisius. In 1804 he met some students of Paisius who had settled in the Monastery of Simon Petra; he had occasion to render some help to them through his contact with Metropolitan Benjamin. This led the latter to have the works of the Hagorite translated into Rumanian and published at Niamets. His *Unseen Warfare* and *Handbook of Counsel* were printed in 1826; these also became very popular. But the *Philokalia,* upon which both Paisius and Nikodemos had worked so much, was not made available to the Rumanian people until well into our 20th century (1946-8), due to the destruction of Niamets and the persecution of Orthodox monasticism there.

One monk-printer was Father Joseph, who put great pain and labor into his holy obedience as typesetter and printer. Another known to us by name was George the printer, about whom we know from his follower, Athanasius of Mt. Athos.*

* The following, to the end of the chapter, is from, "*Notes of a Russian Athonite Monk*

BLESSED PAISIUS VELICHKOVSKY

Blessed Paisius had a Moldavian disciple George who in turn had a disciple, also named George, the printer and typographer at Niamets. At the beginning of the 19th century this George went to Mt. Athos and settled in a cell in the Vigla territory, near the place where the Rumanian Skete is located now. He was a man of learning. Having estranged himself from the world, he was serving God in solitude and had acquired great gifts from the Lord. During the Greek insurrection George left Mt. Athos and came to Morea where a Greek Metropolitan, having guessed from his appearance the exalted spiritual life George was leading, forced him to accept priestly ordination in order to be vouchsafed in turn to receive the blessing of Elder George. In Morea George spent a year until it was safe to return to Moldavia. So he hastened to Vlachia and settled in he Chernika Monastery in a deserted place. He died there, constantly thinking of returning to the Holy Mountain; but he could not fulfill his wish due to the Turkish overrrunning of Mt. Athos.

He spent 60 years in monastic labors and died in deep old age. He was carefully trained in the art of mental activity (Jesus Prayer) by his elder George, a close disciple of the Blessed Paisius. Under his guidance George progressed in this activity to such an extent that from him, as from a fount, flowed forth counsel and wisdom which filled all who thirsted and who were conducting this unseen warfare. From the abundance of his tears Elder George lost all his eyelashes. (Another of his disciples who reached great sanctity and was canonized in 1954, was Callinicus of Chernika, to whom will be devoted a whole chapter in volume two of this work.)

Having heard a good report of the great spiritual heights of Elder George, Athanasius left his Niamets, where he had labored since childhood, and joined George to become a fellow-struggler in his asceticism. They spent eight years together. When his elder was dying, Athanasius wept bitterly, but the elder consoled him by saying that he would live alone only one year. That is exactly what happened. The next year, 1840, his brother came to him and they both went to Mt. Athos, where Athanasius settled in the cell where originally his elder George had lived.

Remembering about Elder Paisius Velichkovsky with awe and reverence, Athanasius told the following in order to confirm the height of his spiritual strivings:

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on His Travels to Mt. Athos' Monasteries, Deserts and Ascetics, Both Ancient and Contemporary," by Father Cyriacus in "Soul-profiting Reading," 1900, no. 2 and following issues.

"I was fortunate to know the last living disciple of Elder Paisius, an ancient elder. You can understand how great was this Paisius from this incident which happened to this disciple of his, who was a man of mature spirituality. Once he was sitting on his cot in contemplation and suddenly he saw (as is revealed in spiritual ecstacy to such men) that some sort of altar was being placed and a multitude of demons surrounded it, and then other demons brought Satan with demonic solemnity, who sat upon the prepared altar. One by one the demons would come to him with reports and he would question them. 'Where were you?' Satan asked the first demon. 'I was at the place of such and such a monk, who lives in silence outside of the Monastery (at that time in the Monastery under Paisius' supervision here were many desert-dwellers, mostly Russians and Moldavians), and could not come close to him, because, whenever I would approach him, he would fall down to the ground (of course, in prayer before God) and fire would come out from him which would burn me, and I could in no way come close to him.' Then Satan ordered him to be beaten, just like the others who did not succeed in their demonic deeds. Thus five or six demons were beaten. Then Satan began to groan and said : 'Oh, how these *trifolois* bother me, that is, these rags — the books (the translations of Paisius); but the time will come when everything will be according to my will, and they (the books) will be no more!'

"So," added elder Athanasius, "that time did come, for the library of such great renown burned to the ground in Niamets Monastery and those books on the spiritual activity which did remain — who looks into them now? Such were the disciples of Paisius Velichkovsky."

Not only the metochia (Monastery extensions elsewhere) were confiscated, but also all the property of Niamets was taken away from the monks, to whom was left only the empty monastery, and now they are receiving a salary; the monks administer nothing and are forbidden to tonsure any newcomer, and in order to ruin those who remain, lay families are settled in every monastery. All desert-dwellers have been gathered into the Monastery walls, and thus the desert dwellings were destroyed. The monks from the ten sketes were also gathered into one Monastery.

Elder Athanasius continued:

"It is indispensable to read patristic books all the time. All the holy fathers read much, they read until they would receive the grace of prayer. Oh, how well St. Nilus of Sora describes the state of silence!" Elder Athanasius

knew the writings of St. Nilus, of course, through the inheritance of Paisius Velitchkovsky, who among other translations very likely also translated St. Nilus' writings into Moldavian, since Fr. Athanasius did not know Russian.

In October, 1873, Athanasius becmae sick and died on the 23rd; he was buried in the common cemetery.

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E. Total distribution (sum of C and D)	2359	2334
F. Copies not distributed		
1. Office use, left over, spoiled after printing	496	591
2. Returns from news agents	0	0
G. Total (sum of E and F)	2855	2925

11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
(Signature) Father Seraphim

(Continued from page 212.)

the spiritual condition, in order to acquire an understanding of the miserable condition of our body, the condition of its deadness caused by estrangement from God.

"In this condition of deadness, by reason of their extreme crudeness and coarseness, the bodily senses are incapable of communion with spirits, they do not see them, do not hear them, do not sense them. Thus the blunted axe is no longer capable of being used according to its purpose. The holy spirits avoid communion with men who are unworthy of such communion; while the fallen spirits, who have drawn us into their fall, have mingled with us and, so as the more easily to hold us in capitivty, strive to make both themselves and their chains unnoticeable to us. And if they do reveal themselves, they do it in order to strengthen their dominion over us.

"All of us who are in slavery to sin must understand that communion with holy angels is unnatural to us by reason of our estrangement from them by the fall; that what is natural to us, for the same reason, is communion with the fallen spirits, to whose rank we belong in soul; that the spirits who appear sensuously to men who are in a state of sinfulness and fall, are demons and not in the least holy angels. 'A filthy soul,' said St. Isaac the Syrian, 'does not enter the pure realm and is not joined to holy spirits' (Homily 74). Holy angels appear only to holy men who have restored communion with God and with them by a holy life.*

Contact with Fallen Spirits

"Although the demons, in appearing to men, usually assume the appearance of bright angels in order to deceive the more easily; although they also strive sometimes to convince men that they are human souls and not demons (this manner of deception at the present time is in special *fashion* among

* However, in rare cases, for some special purpose of God, holy angels do appear to sinful men and even to animals, as Bishop Ignatius notes below. (*Ed note.*)

demons, due to the particular disposition of contemporary men to believe it); even though they sometimes foretell the future; even though they reveal mysteries — still one must not trust them in any way whatsoever. With them truth is mixed with falsehood; truth is used at times only for a more convenient deception. *Satan is transformed into an angel of light, and his ministers as the servants of righteousness,* said the Apostle Paul (II Cor. 11:14, 15)" (Bishop Ignatius, *Collected Works,* vol. III, pp. 7-9).

"A general rule for all men is by no means to trust the spirits when they appear in sensuous form, not to enter into conversation with them, not to pay any attention to them, to acknowledge their appearance as a great and most dangerous temptation. At the time of this temptation one should direct one's mind and heart to God with a prayer for mercy and for deliverance from temptation. The desire to see spirits, curiosity to find out anything about them and from them, is a sign of the greatest foolishness and total ignorance of the Orthodox Church's traditions concerning moral and active life. Knowledge of spirits is acquired quite differently than is supposed by the inexperienced and careless experimenter. Open communion with spirits for the inexperienced is the greatest misfortune, or serves as a source of the greatest misfortunes.

"The Divinely-inspired writer of the book of Genesis says that after the fall of the first men, God, in pronouncing sentence on them before banishing them from paradise, *made for them garments of skins, and clothed them* (Gen. 3:20). The garments of skins, in the explanation of the Holy Fathers (St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* Book 3, ch. 1), signify our coarse flesh which, at the fall, was altered: it lost its subtlety and spiritual nature and received its present crudeness. Although the original reason for this change was the fall, still the change occurred under the influence of the Almighty Creator, in His unutterable mercy towards us, and for our great good. Among the other consequences, profitable for us, which come from the condition in which our body now is, we should indicate this one: through the crudeness of our body we have become incapable of the

sensuous perception of the spirits into whose realm we have fallen . . . The wisdom and goodness of God have placed an obstacle between men, cast down to earth from paradise, and the spirits who had been cast down to earth from heaven; this obstacle is the coarse materiality of the human body. Thus do earthly rulers separate evil-doers from human society by a prison wall, lest they harm this society according to their own desire and corrupt other men. (St. John Cassian, Conference 8, ch. 12.) The fallen spirits act on men, bringing them sinful thoughts and feelings; but very few men attain to the sensuous perception of spirits" (Bishop Ignatius, pp. 11-12).

"The soul, clothed in a body, closed off and separated by it from the world of spirits, gradually trains itself by the study of God's law, or, what is the same thing, by the study of Christianity, and acquires the capability to distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:14). Then the spiritual perception of spirits is granted to it, and, if this is in conformity with the purposes of God Who guides it, the sensuous perception of them also, since delusion and deception are for it now much less dangerous, while experience and knowledge are profitable.

"At the separation of the soul from the body by visible death, we again enter into the rank and society of spirits. From this it is evident that for a successful entry into the world of spirits it is essential to train oneself in good time in the law of God. That it is precisely for this instruction that there has been furnished us a certain amount of time, determined for each person by God for his pilgrimage on earth. This pilgrimage is called earthly life.

The Opening of the Senses

"Men become capable of seeing spirits by a certain alteration of the senses, which is accomplished in a way that is unnoticeable and inexplicable to a man. He only notes in himself that he has suddenly begun to see what before this he had not seen and what others do not see, and to hear what before this he had not heard. For those who experience in themselves such an alteration of the senses, it is very simple and natural, even though not explainable to oneself and

others; for those who have not experienced it, it is strange and not understandable. In the same way, it is known to all that men are capable of being immersed in sleep; but what kind of phenomenon sleep is, and in what way, unnoticed to oneself, we pass over from a condition of wakefulness to a condition of sleep and self-forgetfulness — this remains a mystery for us.

"The alteration of the senses by which a man enters into sensuous communion with the beings of the invisible world is called in Sacred Scripture the *opening of the senses*. The Scripture says: *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand (Numbers 22:31)*. Being surrounded by enemies, the Prophet Elisha, in order to calm his frightened servant, *prayed and said: Lord, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha* (IV Kings 6:17-18)." (See also Luke 24:16-31).

"From the quoted places of Sacred Scripture it is clear that the bodily organs serve as it were as doors and gates into the inner chamber where the soul is, and that these gates are opened and closed at the command of God. Most wisely and mercifully, these gates remain constantly closed in fallen men, lest our sworn enemies, the fallen spirits, burst in upon us and bring about our perdition. This measure is all the more essential in that we, after the fall, find ourselves in the realm of *fallen* spirits, surrounded by them, enslaved by them. Having no possibility to break in on us, they make themselves known to us from outside, causing various sinful thoughts and fantasies, and by them enticing the credulous soul into communion with them. It is not permitted for a man to remove the supervision of God and by his own means (by God's allowance but not by His will) to open his own senses and enter into visible communion with spirits. But this does happen. It is obvious that by one's own means one can attain communion only with fallen spirits It is not characteristic of holy angels to take part in something not in agreement with the will of God, something not pleasing to God . . .

"What attracts men into entering into open communion with spirits? Those who are light-minded and ignorant of Christianity in action are attracted by curiosity, by ignorance, by unbelief, without understanding that by entering into such communion they can cause themselves the greatest harm" (pp. 13-14).

"The idea that there is anything especially important in the sensuous perception of spirits is a mistaken one. Sensuous perception without spiritual perception does not provide a proper understanding of spirits; it provides only a superficial understanding of them. Very easily it can provide the most mistaken conceptions, and this indeed is what is most often provided to the inexperienced and to those infected with vainglory and self-esteem. The spiritual perception of spirits is attained only by true Christians, whereas men of the most depraved life are the most capable of the sensuous perception of them . . . A very few people are capable of this by their natural constitution,* and to a very few the spirits appear because of some special circumstance in life. In the latter two cases a man is not subject to blame, but he must make every effort to get out of this condition, which is very dangerous. In our time many allow themselves to enter into communion with fallen spirits by means of magnetism (spiritism), in which the fallen spirits usually appear in the form of bright angels and deceive and delude by means of various interesting tales, mixing together truth with falsehood; they always cause an extreme disorder to the soul and even to the mind" (p. 19).

'Those who see spirits, even holy angels, sensuously **should** not have any fancies about themselves: this perception **alone,** in itself, is no testimony whatever of the merit of the perceivers; not only depraved men are capable of this, but even irrational animals (Numbers 22:23)" (p. 21).

The Danger of Contact with Spirits

"The perception of spirits with the eyes of sense always brings harm, sometimes greater and sometimes less, to men who do not have spiritual perception. Here on earth images of truth are mixed together with images of falsehood (St.

* I.e., by a mediumistic talent which can be inherited (*Ed. note.*)

Isaac the Syrian, Homily 2), as in a land in which good is mixed together with evil, as in the land of banishment of fallen angels and fallen men" (p.23).

"One who perceives spirits sensuously can easily be deceived to his own harm and perdition. If, on perceiving spirits, he shows trust or credulity towards them, he will unfailingly be deceived, he will unfailingly be attracted, he will unfailingly be sealed with the seal of deception, not understandable to the inexperienced, the seal of a frightful injury in his spirit; and further, the possibility of correction and salvation is often lost. This has happened with many, very many. It has happened not only with pagans, whose priests were for the most part in open communion with demons; it has happened not only with many Christians who do not know the mysteries of Christianity and out of some circumstance or other have entered into communion with spirits; it has happened with many strugglers and monks who have perceived spirits sensuously without acquiring spiritual perception of them.

"The correct, lawful entry into the world of spirits is provided only by the doctrine and practice of Christian struggle. All other means are unlawful and must be renounced as worthless and ruinous. It is God Himself Who leads the true struggler of Christ into perception (of spirits). When God is guiding, the phantoms of truth, in which falsehood clothes itself, are separated from truth itself; then the struggler is given, first of all, the spiritual perception of spirits, revealing to him in detail and with precision the qualities of these spirits. Only after this are certain **ascetics** granted the sensusous perception of spirits, by which the knowledge of them attained by spiritual perception is completed" (p. 24).

Some Practical Advice

Bishop Ignatius takes from the discourse of St. Anthony, in St. Athanasius' Life of him (already mentioned above as a chief source of our knowledge of the activity of demons), practical advice for Christian strugglers on how to behave with regard to sensuous perception of spirits if they should

happen to occur to one. This is of extreme value to all who wish to lead a true Christian spiritual life in our own days, when (for reasons we shall try to explain below) the sensuous perception of spirits has become much more common than heretofore. St. Anthony teaches:

"You must know the following for your protection. When any kind of vision presents itself, do not become frightened, but no matter what kind of vision it might be, manfully ask it first of all: 'Who are you, and where do you come from?' If it is a manifestation of saints, they will calm you and will turn your fear into joy. But if it is a demonic apparition, when it encounters firmness in your soul it will immediately waver, because the question serves as a sign of a brave soul. By asking such a question, Joshua son of Nun became convinced of the truth (Joshua 5:13), and the enemy did not hide from Daniel (Daniel 10:20)" (Bishop Ignatius, pp. 43-44; *Life of St. Anthony,* English edition of Eastern Orthodox Books, p. 29).

After relating how even St. Symeon the Stylite was once almost deceived by a demon who appeared to him in the form of an angel in a fiery chariot (Lives of Saints, Sept. 1), Bishop Ignatius warns the Orthodox Christians of today: "If the saints have been in such danger of being deceived by evil spirits, this danger is even more frightful for us. If the saints have not always recognized demons who appeared to them in the form of saints and Christ Himself, how is it possible for us to think of ourselves that we will recognize them without mistake? The sole means of salvation from these spirits is absolutely to refuse perception of them and communion with them, acknowledging ourselves as unfit for such perception and communion.

"The holy instructors of Christian struggle . . . command pious strugglers not to trust any kind of image or vision if they should suddenly appear, not to enter into conversation with them, not to pay any attention to them. They command that during such apparitions one should guard oneself with the sign of the Cross, close one's eyes, and in resolute awareness of one's unworthiness and unfitness for seeing holy spirits, to entreat God that He might protect us from all

Bishop IGNATIUS BRIANCHANINOV

nets and deceptions which are cunningly set out for men by the spirits of malice" (pp. 45-6).

Further, Bishop Ignatius quotes St. Gregory the Sinaite: "By no means accept it if you see anything sensuously or with the mind, inside or outside of you, whether it be an image of Christ or an angel or some saint, or if a light should be fancied or depicted by the imagination in the mind. For by nature it is characteristic of the mind itself to indulge in fantasies, and it easily forms the images it desires; this is usual in those who do not pay strict attention to themselves, and by this they do harm to themselves" (pp. 47-49).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bishop Ignatius teaches: "The only correct entrance into the world of spirits is the doctrine and practice of Christian struggle. The only correct entrance into the sensuous perception of spirits is Christian advancement and perfection" (p. 53).

"When the time comes which is assigned by the one God and is known to Him alone, we will unfailingly enter the world of spirits ourselves. This time is not far from each of us! May the all-good God grant us to spend earthly life in such a way that during it we might break off communion with fallen spirits, and might enter into communion with holy spirits so that, on this foundaion, having put off the body, we might be numbered with the holy spirits and not the fallen spirits!" (p. 67).

This teaching of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, written over a hundred years ago, could well have been written today, so accurately does it describe the spiritual temptations of our own times, when the "doors of perception" (to use the phrase popularized by one experimenter in this realm, Aldous Huxley) have been opened in men to a degree undreamed of in Bishop Ignatius' day.

These words scarcely need any commentary. The perceptive reader may already have begun to apply them to the "after-death" experiences we have been describing in these pages and thereby have begun to realize the frightful danger for the human soul which these experiences represent. One

LETTERS

Continued)

The article moved me to tears as I read about Archimandrite Photius and the Emperor Alexander. My house is small, but I have dedicated one corner to the martyred royal family and all the new martyrs of Russia. God in His mercy has brought my heart to revere the royal martyrs, and especially the Emperor Nicholas. Often during church services I think of the persecuted brethren in Russia and sometimes weep. On the night of Pascha as we walked in procession three times around the church, I was carrying the processional cross in front. Then, too, I thought of the catacomb Church and wondered how many more years we would be able to celebrate Pascha so openly. In defiance of the forces of evil I held the cross up even higher into the night sky, and I wept.

L., Colorado

who is aware of this Orthodox teaching cannot but look in amazement and horror at the ease with which contemporary "Christians" trust the visions and apparitions which are now becoming so common. The reason for this credulity is clear: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, cut off for centuries now from the Orthodox doctrine and practice of spiritual life, have lost all capability for clear discernment in the realm of spirits. The absolutely essential Christian quality of distrust of one's "good" ideas and feelings has become totally foreign to them. As a result, "spiritual" experiences and apparitions of spirits have become perhaps commoner today than at any other time in the Christian era, and a gullible mankind is prepared to accept a theory of a "new age" of spiritual wonders, or a "new outpouring of the Holy Spirit," in order to explain this fact. So spiritually impoverished has mankind become, imagining itself to be "Christian" even while preparing for the age of demonic "miracles" that is a sign of the last times (Apocalypse 16:14).

Those who are now describing their "after-death" experiences reveal themselves to be as trusting of their experiences as any who have been led astray in the past; in all the contemporary literature on this subject, there are extremely few cases where a person seriously stops to question whether at least part of the experience might be from the devil. The Orthodox reader, of course, will ask this question and try to understand these experiences in the light of the spiritual teaching of the Orthodox Fathers and Saints.

Now we must go on and see what specifically happens to the soul, according to Orthodox teaching, when it leaves the body at death and enters into the realm of spirits.

(To be continued.)

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